

Talking Points

Welcome Home Ceremony for 155th Brigade Combat Team

Saturday, June 3, 2006

First and foremost today ... on this very special occasion ... I want to say on behalf of a grateful state and nation, thank you for your service. You are the embodiment of the American spirit ... and I salute you.

It is profoundly moving to know of your sacrifices, commitment, courage and dedication. At the same time it is reassuring to know that when your country called, you not only answered ... you came out fighting.

As I learned first-hand over Thanksgiving last year during my visit to Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the 155th Brigade Combat Team drew some of the War on Terror's most dangerous assignments ... in places with names like Karbala and Najaf.

I knew your job was hard and I discovered just how successful you were:

- You took 1,487 terrorists off the streets, seized more than 28,000 weapons and destroyed more than 18,000 pounds of munitions, including nearly 8,000 pounds of explosives.
- You took the fight to the enemy with eight Brigade level operations, 21 Task Force level operations and 490 Platoon and Company level operations. You took the streets, neighborhoods and cities away from the terrorists and gave them back to the honest people of Iraq.
- You worked with the new Iraqi government, mentoring and teaching its courageous members in the ways of freedom and democracy. AS part of the process, you made it possible to turn over two forward operating bases in Najaf and Karbala over to the Iraqi government.
- You helped establish essential needs for the Iraqi people, such as electricity, water and fuel, and planted the seeds for better medical care and economic development in a country that had only known terror and oppression.

- And, clearly going beyond the call of duty, each unit in the Brigade adopted at least one school, helping provide the supplies, furniture and facilities to make education a priority.
- Generous donations from people back home here in Mississippi helped you provide 26,000 backpacks to Iraqi children in your areas of operations as they prepared for the coming school year.

I returned from my visit with you almost seven months ago with an overwhelming sense of pride in your contributions to our national effort to bring freedom and self-determination to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. We support you, we support our strategy to return responsibility to the Iraqis and Afghans, and we look forward to freedom and prosperity in the region.

You went to a region of the world marked for decades by the worst kind of fear and despair. It is the kind of hopelessness that inevitably breeds hatred and violence. That violence targets us at home.

Today, because of your service, hope is returning to the region.

By the end of this calendar year, the Mississippi National Guard will have more than 9,011 Army and Air Guard members who have been mobilized in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

The 155th Brigade Combat Team has more than 4,000 citizen soldiers from across the United States; the bulk of your soldiers come from 49 communities from across Mississippi.

Some of these communities and families in them were touched by loss, by the ultimate sacrifice that a soldier can make for his country. I have attended many of these funerals, talked quietly with family members and seen the grief on their faces. Marsha and I mourn for each precious life lost. We pray for grieving families and for members of the 155th whose wounds will affect them for the rest of their lives.

I hope and believe you are like me: We know the sacrifices made are part of the larger, essential mission of removing the scourge of terror from the face of the earth ... to protect generations yet unborn and to preserve freedom.

In that cause, there can be no retreat.

Thank you for standing up to terror. Thank you for the honor with which you represented all Mississippians and, indeed, Americans. Thank you for your courageous service.

And, may I say, welcome home.